

said that when first caught it was coloured like any other Song-Thrush, but had become darker at each moult during the later years of its captivity.

Now, in my experience (and I have kept many examples of both) an English Song-Thrush, even in captivity, is not by any means such a long-lived bird as the common Blackbird: therefore for one to live to the astonishing age of sixteen years is very exceptional*.

Is melanochroism in old age the result of unusual constitutional vigour, as leucochroism seems to be of constitutional weakness? There is no doubt that white and pied varieties of birds are the result either of in-breeding or of failing strength: they undoubtedly become accentuated with age, as I have noted in the case of all which I have possessed (at various times), and notably in the case of a Crimson-eared Waxbill (*Estrilda phœnicotis*) which I have had for six or seven years, and which at the present time has the greater part of its flight-feathers white.

The abnormal variety of *P. gouldiæ* described above will be presented to the Natural History Museum. It has been fed upon white millet, spray-millet, and canary-seed; therefore the change of colour is not due to unnatural feeding.

Yours &c.,

ARTHUR G. BUTLER, Ph.D., F.L.S., F.Z.S.

124 Beckenham Road,

Beckenham.

28th July, 1902.

SIRS,—In the 'Ibis' for July, when treating of the birds collected by Mr. R. M. Hawker on the White Nile, Mr. Ogilvie-Grant remarked (pp. 462-463) on two male Ruffs in a peculiar state of plumage. The peculiarity consisted in their heads and necks being more or less completely white. I think that it may be worth mentioning that in the south of Spain, where in certain winters Ruffs are fairly numerous, I have frequently noticed this phase of plumage, exactly as described by Mr. Grant in birds from

* I consider seven years in captivity a very good age for a Blackbird; this is probably twice as long as it would live in freedom.

the Sudan. I had always regarded it merely as the winter condition of the white-ruffed type of Ruff, rather than as an albinism, which latter would, I imagine, be more uncommon. I venture to send the Editors a skin of one of these white-necked Ruffs, in case it may interest them to examine such a specimen.

Yours &c.,

Houxy, Wark-on-Tyne, Northumberland.

ABEL CHAPMAN.

26th August, 1902.

SIRS,—Towards the end of March, while spending a few days in Essex, I was particularly struck by the unusual number of Robins, every hundred yards or so of ground being tenanted by a separate pair. The weather being bright and genial, the males were everywhere conspicuous, and in full song. The females, as is usual at that season, were much more shy and retiring in their habits, but their presence might always be detected in the thick covert and hedge-bottoms by the plaintive, long-drawn note, half whistle, half squeak, which they constantly uttered so long as one remained in the proximity of their nesting-site. A beautiful male, in full song, was perched on one of the thick clumps of hawthorn, briar, and bramble, which formed an interrupted hedge along the sides of a deep ditch. The nature of the ground and the gaps in the hedge afforded excellent opportunities for a close approach, and, while I watched him at a distance of a few yards, the female Robin flew up from the dense undergrowth, and, perching near her mate, commenced coquetting. The male ceased singing, and, leaving his perch, settled on a branch close to the female. Raising his tail over his back, after the manner of a Wren, he commenced setting and putting himself into attitudes before her. As he became more excited he gradually raised his body to its full height in a perfectly erect position, with his bill pointing straight into the air and his tail raised to an extraordinary extent. Then, with throat puffed out, he uttered a continuous gurgling twitter, swaying his body meanwhile from side to side. The female appeared to be much pleased with the performance of her mate, and half

Fig. 20.



THE ROBIN'S LOVE-SONG.

crouching, with drooping wings, and slightly raised tail, puffed out the feathers of her sides and flanks. When the love-song had reached its height, it abruptly ceased, but before the male had time to recover his normal position the female had darted off. The male closely pursued her in and out of the bushes, and both were lost to sight for the time being. Presently the male returned to his high perch and commenced to sing.

For the greater part of a morning I watched this pair of Robins, and twice saw the male go through the same curious performance. On each occasion the scene lasted for a minute or more. I made a series of rough sketches of the birds' positions while they were still fresh in my memory, and from these Mr. G. E. Lodge has prepared the accompanying illustration (p. 678), which gives a very exact idea of the male uttering his love-spell, though it is impossible to convey the curious swaying motion of the body which accompanied it. I had never before witnessed this curious courting habit, and I do not find mention of it in any book on British birds to which I have referred.

Yours &c.,

British Museum (Natural History). W. R. OGILVIE-GRANT.

1st July, 1902.

Report on the British Museum (Natural History) for 1901.—The following extracts from the Parliamentary Report on the British Museum, issued in 1902, relate to the National Collection of Birds, and to the progress made in its Arrangement and Description in 1901 :—

“Great progress has been made during the past year with the re-arrangement and exhibition of the birds in the Public Gallery. Two-thirds of the collection have now been put into order, the old and faded specimens having been removed and replaced by beautifully mounted examples, representing the leading families and genera of the class Aves. The mounting has been entrusted to Mr. Cullingford, of Durham, and Mr. G. Pickardt, both of whom are celebrated for their correct taxidermy of animals.

“Two new groups of British Birds with their nests and

eggs have been acquired during the year, viz., that of the Tawny Owl (*Syrnium aluco*), presented by Mr. C. B. Horsburgh, and that of the Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*), presented by Dr. J. E. Kelso and Mr. John Stares.

“Six additional pier-cases have been placed in the Bird Gallery, containing groups of certain families, such as the Birds of Paradise, Bower-birds, &c.

“During the past year considerable accessions have been made to the osteological and oological collections. These have been registered and incorporated, and marked progress has been made in the arrangement of the skeletons and eggs of birds.

“The collection of eggs is being catalogued by Mr. Eugene W. Oates, who has, in the course of the year, arranged 15,000 specimens in the cabinets, and has completed the first volume of the ‘Catalogue of Birds’ Eggs in the British Museum,’ published by the Trustees. The second volume of this important work is also shortly to be issued, and the third volume is in progress.

“The whole of the large collection of skeletons and bones of the Accipitres has been arranged and labelled by Mr. W. P. Pycraft, who has also determined all the accessions to the collection of birds in spirit.

“Mr. Robert Reid, who has been a voluntary assistant in the Museum for some years past, has done the entire registration and labelling of the accessions, and his help is gratefully acknowledged by the officers of the Bird-section.

“The total number of additions to the specimens of the Class of Birds is 19,743, of which the following deserve especial notice:—

“Fifteen thousand one hundred and fifty eggs bequeathed by the late Mr. Philip Crowley: 150 birds (including the types of two new species), 660 eggs, and 20 nests from China, presented by Mr. C. B. Rickett: 28 birds in spirit, presented by Mr. J. D. La Touche: a valuable collection of birds and eggs from the ‘Southern Cross’ Antarctic Expedition, presented by Sir George Newnes, Bart.: the type of a new species of bird, *Eremiornis carteri*, from W. Australia, presented by Mr. T. Carter: 3 birds, including

one new to the collection, from Barrow Island, and six eggs from Freemantle, Australia, presented by Mr. B. H. Woodward: 59 birds from Borneo, presented by Mrs. Jameson: 47 birds from British Central Africa, presented by Lieut.-Col. Manning: 31 birds from Somaliland, including the type of *Pyrrhulauda harrisoni*, presented by Mr. J. J. Harrison: 107 birds from Queensland, presented by Mr. H. C. Robinson: 103 birds from San Paulo, S.E. Brazil, presented by Sir William Ingram, Bart.: 2 Grecian Long-tailed Tits (*Acredula macedonica*), from Greece, presented by Capt. Farquhar, R.N.: 52 birds from Somaliland, presented by H.H. the Gaikwar of Baroda: a nest and eggs, with parent birds, of the Tawny Owl (*Syrnium aluco*), from Somerset, presented by Mr. C. B. Horsburgh: the type-specimens of a new species of Babbling Thrush (*Crateropus hindii*), from British E. Africa, presented by Dr. S. L. Hinde: 220 nests and eggs from Victoria, presented by the Government of Victoria: 52 birds from China, presented by Mr. C. W. Campbell: 54 birds from the Shan States, including the types of two new species, presented by Lieut.-Col. G. Rippon: 76 eggs from the White Nile, presented by Mr. R. M. Hawker: 393 birds from Somaliland and S. Abyssinia, including the types of three new species, presented by Mr. Alfred E. Pease: 81 birds from Deelfontein, Cape Colony, presented by Col. Sloggett: 20 birds from the Orange-River Colony, presented by Capt. G. E. H. Barrett-Hamilton: 26 birds from Argentina, presented by Mr. Collingwood Ingram: 63 birds, including examples of three species new to the collection and three eggs, from Shendi, Sudan, presented by the Hon. N. C. Rothschild and Mr. A. F. R. Wollaston: 4 types of new species of birds from Equatorial Africa, presented by Mr. F. J. Jackson, C.B.: 179 birds, including four types and six species new to the collection, from British East Africa, presented by Sir Harry Johnston, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.: 124 birds from New Zealand and the adjacent islands, including the type of a new Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax ranfurlyi*), presented by the Earl of Ranfurly: a specimen of the Caroline Crake (*Porzana carolina*), from Tiree Island, presented by Mr. E. L. Phillips:

294 birds from the White Nile, received in exchange from Mr. R. M. Hawker: 37 birds from the Sudan, including the type of *Cisticola aridula*, and examples of two species new to the collection, received in exchange from Mr. H. F. Witherby: 89 birds from the Cameroons, including the types of five new species and examples of six species new to the collection, collected by Mr. G. L. Bates, purchased: 211 birds from Ecuador and Peru, including examples of four species new to the collection, purchased: 49 birds, including the types of nine new species and examples of 23 species new to the collection, and 76 nests and eggs, from New Guinea, collected by Herr Weiske, purchased: and a series of 529 specimens of the family Paridæ, including four types and examples of many species new to the collection, formed by Prof. Menzbier, obtained by purchase.”

The late Mr. Simons's Collection of Birds.—An important series of nearly 2500 South-American bird-skins has been recently acquired by the British Museum of Natural History. This represents a part of the results of the labours of the late Mr. Perry O. Simons, who has been engaged in South America for several years collecting Mammals for Mr. Oldfield Thomas. Mr. Simons, we regret to say, was murdered by his native guide in November last, on the boundary between Chile and Argentina, near Puente de Inca, just as he had nearly completed his explorations and was on the point of coming home. Commencing with Ecuador, Mr. Simons had travelled through Peru to Bolivia and Northern Argentina, visiting many localities which no collector had previously explored, and had been at work in South America for about three years when he met his death.

Mr. Budgett's Expedition to the Semiki.—Mr. J. S. Budgett, F.Z.S., who has left England on a scientific mission at Western Uganda, writing from Kampala (13th July, 1902), informs us that he has obtained from Mr. Jackson the services of one of his trained skinners, and is just starting for the Albert Lake. He intends then to proceed to Fort Portal, and so to some spot on the River Semiki, where he will work generally at the Fauna of that little-known district.

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